



# PRESS RELEASE

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**New York State  
Unified Court System**

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**Documentary on Civil Rights Leader Franklin H. Williams  
Among the Winners of This Year's Prestigious Telly Awards**  
*The Award-Winning Documentary Was Conceived and Developed by the  
Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission and NYS Unified Court System*

**NEW YORK**— “A Bridge to Justice: The Life of Franklin H. Williams,” a documentary developed by the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission and Court System that pays tribute to the civil rights leader after whom the Commission is named, is among the winners of this year’s prestigious Telly Awards. The Telly Awards honor the best work created within television and across video, with “A Bridge to Justice: The Life of Franklin H. Williams” receiving the 2021 Silver Telly for Television (General) Documentary.

As chair of the New York State Judicial Commission on Minorities from 1987 to 1990, Franklin H. Williams issued a seminal report on the perception and treatment of minorities in the court system that led to the establishment of the Commission as a permanent entity in the courts. Renamed the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission in 1991 and made up of court system judges and professional staff, its members work to promote racial and ethnic fairness in the courts.

The documentary examines the life of the trailblazing attorney-diplomat who early in his career served the NAACP as Thurgood Marshall's assistant counsel, going on to become director of the west coast NAACP. Among his many other achievements, Mr. Williams was an organizer of the Peace Corps, its first African-American director, and served as United States Ambassador to Ghana, earning a Distinguished Service Award.

The film includes archival Oval Office audio of President Lyndon Johnson and then-Solicitor General Thurgood Marshall discussing Mr. Williams, as well as interviews with former Chief Judges Sol Wachtler and Jonathan Lippman.

Joyce Y. Hartsfield, the Commission's former executive director, and John Caher, a member of the Court System's communications team, came up with the idea for the documentary several years ago, interviewing the Commission's original members. Videographer Nicholas Ullo, of the Court System, filmed the interviews.

WNED-TV, a PBS affiliate, expressed interest in airing a documentary about Franklin H. Williams on public television, with Mr. Caher writing the script and Dr. Enid Gort, an anthropologist and Franklin Williams' biographer, serving as a consultant. The State's Office of General Services/Media Services, led by Christopher Conto, produced the video, which is funded in part through generous contributions from the New York Bar Foundation and the Historical Society of the Courts. The documentary is narrated by actor Sterling K. Brown.

Hon. Shirley Troutman, Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, Fourth Department, and co-chair of the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission, noted, "It is indeed an honor for the Commission to receive such a prestigious recognition and for the life of such a noble contributor to the civil rights movement to be shared with others far beyond the borders of New York. Furthermore, I am re-energized every time I view the Ambassador's story to strive to build on the legacy he started some thirty years ago."

Hon. Troy K. Webber, Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department, and co-chair of the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission, said, “Franklin H. Williams, civil rights attorney, an associate of Thurgood Marshall, former Ambassador to Ghana and Peace Corps organizer, was a trailblazer who spent his life fighting for civil rights and social justice. The Williams Commission, a permanent court-based commission dedicated to promoting racial and ethnic fairness in the courts, is his enduring legacy. Yet, for all his many accomplishments, Franklin H. Williams remains relatively unknown. This documentary, we hope, will ensure that his story and contributions to civil rights will continue to be shared for generations and inspire others to do what is right in the struggle for equal justice.”

Each year, the Telly Awards receive thousands of entries spanning five continents. Entrants are judged by the Telly Awards Judging Council, an industry body of over 200 leading experts, including executives from Dow Jones, Duplass Brothers Productions, Complex Networks, A&E Networks, Hearst Media, ESPN Films, RYOT, Vice+ and Vimeo. The winners represent work from some of the most respected advertising agencies, television stations, production companies and publishers from around the world.

“A Bridge to Justice: The Life of Franklin H. Williams” aired on public television earlier this year. The documentary is available at:

<https://video.wned.org/video/a-bridge-to-justice-the-life-of-franklin-h-williams-enve1j/>

and on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcipe61lb6c&t=1s>

For more information about the work of the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission, go to: [www.nycourts.gov/ip/ethnic-fairness](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/ethnic-fairness).

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